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SUBJECT: NNSA ASSISTING UGANDA IN BUILDING RADIOLOGICAL
SEALED-SOURCE STORAGE FACILITY

¶1. (U) Summary: An August 24-26 visit from U.S. officials from the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is the latest step in a joint U.S.-Ugandan response to the theft of radiological material from a storage area at Mulago Hospital in Kampala in 2007. The objective of this effort is to enhance the radiological security capability of the Ugandan government through training and infrastructure development. With Uganda taking concrete steps to increase its regulatory and administrative capabilities, and increasing numbers of disused cancer treatment machines and geological equipment with small amounts of radiological material, NNSA has offered to help finance the construction of a permanent radiological source storage site. End Summary.

Background: Theft of Radiological Material

¶2. (U) Uganda has a small but growing number of radiological sources in country for industrial and medical purposes. The largest of these sealed sources are a cancer-treatment machine at Mulago (Kampala) and a disused source at St Mary's Lacor (Gulu) hospitals. Other smaller sources include calibration sources, well-logging sources, and road-construction moisture density measurement equipment. Further, the recent discovery of oil in western Uganda will likely result in the importation of additional devices with radiological sources.

¶3. (U) In 2002 and 2003, two orphan sources of Cesium 137 and Cobalt 60 were confiscated from illicit traffickers. These and other spent sources were stored in a 3 foot by 4 foot stand alone storage area at Mulago Hospital. Security at this storage area was limited to a padlock with no electronic-surveillance equipment. In July 2007, thieves broke into the storage area and stole radiological sources placed there for safe keeping. Local authorities suspect the thieves were simply looking for something of value and were unaware of the radiological nature of the items taken.

NNSA Visit

¶4. (U) This theft brought Uganda to the attention of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the NNSA. Representatives from the NNSA first visited Uganda in 2008 to assist in developing the capability to manage Uganda's medical and industrial nuclear and radiological material. Concrete steps taken thus far include:

-- Installation of security systems on the Mulago Hospital storage area and the cancer-treatment machines at Mulago and St Mary's Lacor Hospitals.

-- Training of personnel to search for, identify, and recover disused radiological sources.

-- Development of an initial inventory of known nuclear and

radiological source material in Uganda.

-- Passage of the Atomic Energy Act, 2008 in Parliament.

-- Development of an Atomic Energy Council, made up of academics and medical and industry experts, to act as a national regulator for nuclear science and technology.

15. (U) With these steps already in place, NNSA representatives Michael Itamura and Michael Strosinski again visited Uganda August 24-26 to discuss next steps and areas of collaboration with the Uganda Ministry of Energy and the Atomic Energy Council. The main thrust of the visit was a discussion on building of a permanent radiological material storage facility with funding from NNSA. The current storage area at Mulago Hospital is insufficient for current needs, not to mention estimated future increases in disused radiological material.

16. (SBU) NNSA representatives said the return of relative calm to northern Uganda offered a chance to remove a disused/broken cancer treatment machine from the hospital in Gulu. The machine cannot be moved, however, until Uganda has a new storage facility with enough space to safely secure it.

17. (U) To move this facility forward, the Atomic Energy Council must first develop a complete inventory of nuclear and radiological sources in Uganda and an estimate of future sources. Uganda's current inventory includes only 24 sources - a relatively low number that likely indicates the existence of many unrecorded/unregistered items. Further, the Atomic Energy Council must acquire land for a new storage facility and obtain all necessary environmental and regulatory clearances from the Government of Uganda (GOU). NNSA

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will then assist with the funding of an appropriate storage facility based on the current and estimated future needs in Uganda.

Comment

16. (SBU) The theft of radiological material in 2007 brought the issue of unsecured radiological material in Uganda to the attention of the GOU, the IAEA, and the NNSA. The actions undertaken thus far by the GOU with the assistance of the NNSA show a strong initial commitment to enhanced regulation and security of radiological materials in Uganda. With the discovery of oil and the development of the oil industry in the Albertine Rift, Uganda faces an increase in imported industrial nuclear and radiological material for geological measurement purposes, resulting in an eventual increase in disused sources in need of proper storage. The successful development of a strong and capable regulatory authority will enable this material to assist Uganda's economic growth without creating a security threat in East Africa. This cable was cleared with the Department of Energy.

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